

Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania

Field-Initiated Research

Type of Applicant

Private university

Project Title

"Exploring the Impact of a Faith-Based Program for At-Risk Youth"

Project Period

October 2002 to January 2004

Focus of Research

The subject of this research is a program called the "Faith- and Community-Based Demonstration Project," an at-risk youth program implemented by the North Philadelphia Cluster of United Methodist Churches (NPC-UMC).

Description of Project

The Cookman United Methodist Church, one of the 8 NPC-UMC congregations, was one of the first congregations to receive funding under the 1996 TANF Charitable Choice legislation to develop this youth program as a model. The program offers a model network of educational offerings targeted to help at-risk youth, ages 14 to 21. The program coordinates home-schooling, general and specialized tutoring, entrepreneurial education/projects, computer classes, teen lounges, peer counseling, mental health counseling, mentoring and case management. The goal of the project is to involve 100 at-risk youth in the network of educational programs by the end of 4 months and continue referrals to other program offerings. Other community churches and groups (local churches, local schools, larger UM organizations, local government agencies) are also involved in helping to provide an even wider "network" of offerings for the participants.

Research Project

This project will assess and analyze the impact of a FBO/CBO the NPC-UMC "Faith-and Community-Based Demonstration Project."

Goals of the Research

Two primary goals:

1. Provide quantitative data regarding change in at-risk youth participants in five key areas:
 - a) education levels,
 - b) use of free time,
 - c) peer and key relationships,
 - d) mental health, and
 - e) religiosity.
 2. Provide qualitative data and an exploratory analysis regarding change in those five areas.
- Two subordinate goals:
3. Assess the content, style and impact of the faith-based element of the program.

4. Examine whether a successful program in one FBO, the Cookman Church, can be duplicated at the Cluster level, at the other 7 church sites.

Research Questions

Two major research issues/questions:

1. Whether at-risk youth who are associated with a caring congregation and supportive services will do better.
2. Whether replication of comprehensive, faith-based programs will work, and if so, how.

Sub-Research Questions and Hypotheses

N/A

Methodology

The study will use a mixed-methods time-series design with a convenience sample. The study will collect quantitative and qualitative measures of impact on youth at the start of the study and then two more times at 3 month intervals. Data will be collected measuring change in the five areas, and also through surveys, interviews, and observations. Four of the key areas (all but religiosity) will be measured using the "Comprehensive Adolescent Severity Inventory" (CASI). Religiosity will be assessed with the "Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality."

Limitations

This is not as strong a research design as a random sample with a control group, but is appropriate for exploratory research.

Background

Past studies have shown many congregations serve youth and have a positive impact on youth. Because the social interactions of religious communities have positive benefits on adults, the goal of this program is to transfer this finding into youth work by strengthening positive relationships -- ones that offer support and guidance -- in the lives of these youth. Studies of youth show that caring relationships, such as connection to mentors, decrease chance of deviant behavior. More research needs to be done to try to quantify the tangible impact of "faith" by measuring impacts in the lives and attitudes of participants in faith-based programs. Some evidence shows that spirituality may be a particularly important avenue through which to reach youth, because adolescents are interested in spirituality.

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Additional Pertinent Background Information

N/A

Geographic Location

8 congregational sites in North Philadelphia bounded by Westmoreland Street (North), Oxford Street (South), 26th Street (west), and 7th Street (east). This area includes five zip codes, 15 census tracks that includes some of the most economically distressed areas of the city.

Grant Award Amount

\$193,456



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